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Tsarist Origins (1565–1917)

Russia's first political police, the distant ancestor of today's KGB, was the Oprichnina, founded in 1565 by Ivan the Terrible, the first Grand Duke of Muscovy to be crowned Tsar. The six thousand Oprichniki dressed in black, rode on black horses, and carried on their saddles the emblems of a dog's head and a broom, symbolizing their mission to sniff out and sweep away treason. As in Stalin's Russia, most of the treason that they swept away existed only in the minds of the Oprichniki and their ruler. Their victims included whole cities, chief among them Novgorod, most of whose inhabitants were massacred in a five-week orgy of cruelty in 1570. Ivan himself oscillated between periods of barbarous sadism and periods of prayer and repentance. After a seven-year reign of terror, the Oprichnina was abolished in 1572. Almost four centuries later the victims of Stalin's NKVD sometimes called their persecutors Oprichniki behind their backs. Stalin praised the "progressive role" of the Oprichnina in centralizing state power and reducing the power of the boyar aristocracy, but criticized Ivan for wasting time at prayer that could have been better spent liquidating more boyars.¹

The next powerful organization founded to deal with political crime was Peter the Great's Preobrazhensky Prikaz, set up so surreptitiously at the end of the seventeenth century that the exact date of its

foundation still remains a mystery. Like the Oprichnina, the Preobrazhensky Prikaz foreshadowed, on a smaller scale, the climate of fear and denunciation engendered by Stalin's Terror. Those who perished in its cellars and torture chambers ranged from nobles who had tried to evade state service to insignificant drunks who had dared to make jokes about the Tsar.² Peter is chiefly remembered today both inside and outside the Soviet Union as the modernizer of the Russian state, whose new capital of St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) was intended "to open a window onto Europe." But he was also a ruler of fearsome cruelty. His son and heir, the Tsarevich Aleksei, who fled abroad, was lured back to Russia and tortured to death.

Like Ivan's Oprichnina, Peter's Preobrazhensky Prikaz did not survive its creator. Though political persecution continued intermittently, there was no further attempt to found a specialized political police until after the unsuccessful Decembrist Rising of 1825, a century after Peter's death. The Decembrists were Russia's first revolutionary movement. Unlike earlier rebels, they aimed not simply at replacing the Tsar but at creating a new political system—either a republic or a constitutional monarchy—in which serfdom would be abolished. In 1826, in order to forestall further risings, Tsar Nicholas I (1825–55) established the Third Section of his Imperial Chancellery as his political police.³

Both Nicholas and the Third Section's first head, Count Benckendorff, sought to distance themselves from the brutal precedents of the Oprichnina and Preobrazhensky Prikaz. The incongruous symbol of the Third Section was a handkerchief allegedly presented by the Tsar and preserved in a glass case in its archives. According to a pious but plausible tradition, Nicholas told Benckendorff, "Here is your whole directive. The more tears you wipe away with this handkerchief, the more faithfully will you serve my aims." This eccentric metaphor suited both the Tsar's grandiloquent self-image as "father-commander" of his people and the Third Section's view of itself as the "moral physician" of the nation. But the major preoccupation of the Third Section was what the KGB later called "ideological subversion": political dissent in all its forms. Like the KGB today, in order to keep track of dissent, it believed it necessary to monitor public opinion. Benckendorff prepared annual Surveys of Public Opinion, later entitled "The Moral and Political Situation in Russia." "Public opinion," declared the 1827 survey, "is for the government what a topographical map is for an army command in time of war."

In addition to employing a large network of informers, the head of the Third Section also had under him a Corps of Gendarmes, several thousand strong, charged with safeguarding state security and immediately recognizable by their blue tunics and white gloves. Yet, by KGB standards, the Third Section was a small organization. Its headquarters *apparat* grew slowly from sixteen at its founding to forty by Nicholas I's death in 1855. The Third Section's heads lacked the personal brutality of earlier political police chiefs. Alexander Herzen, the leading political dissident of the post-Decembrist generation, was "ready to believe . . . that Benckendorff did not do all the harm he might have done as head of that terrible police, being outside the law and above the law, which had the right to interfere in everything. . . . But he did no good either; he had not enough will-power, energy or heart for that." When summoned into Benckendorff's presence in 1840, Herzen found his face "worn and tired," with "that deceptively good-natured expression which is often found in evasive and apathetic persons."⁴ Count Aleksei Orlov, who succeeded Benckendorff after his death in 1844, was the brother of the leading Decembrist, General Mikhail Orlov. It is difficult to imagine Stalin a century later allowing any relative of Trotsky or Bukharin even to enter the NKVD, let alone to become its head.

Of the 290,000 people sentenced to Siberian exile or hard labor between 1823 and 1861, only 5 percent had been found guilty of political offenses, and many of these were not Russian dissidents but Polish patriots opposed to Russian rule. Within Russia political dissidence was still virtually confined to a disaffected section of the educated upper class. The reign of Nicholas I nonetheless institutionalized political crime. The 1845 Criminal Code laid down draconian penalties for all "persons guilty of writing and spreading written or printed works or representations intended to arouse disrespect for Sovereign Authority, or for the personal qualities of the Sovereign, or for his government." That code, writes Richard Pipes, is "to totalitarianism what the Magna Carta is to liberty." From 1845 to 1988, save for the period between the failed revolution of 1905 and the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, it remained a crime to question the existing political order. The Criminal Code of 1960 punished "agitation or propaganda for the purpose of subverting or weakening Soviet authority" by prison terms of up to seven years, with up to five further years of exile. Tsarism bequeathed to Bolshevism both a political culture and a legal system in which only the state had rights.⁵

The Third Section prided itself on the fact that during 1848, the main nineteenth-century year of revolution in Western Europe, Russia remained "sommolent and at rest." The ferment in the countryside that followed the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 by Tsar Alexander II (1855-81) persuaded a generation of young upper-class Populists that the peasants were at last ripe for revolution. But the failure of the 1874 Pilgrimage to the People, in which earnest radical idealists toured the countryside striving vainly to rouse the peasants against Tsarism, turned some disillusioned Populists to terrorism. The advocates of terror argued that assassination of Tsarist notables would both demoralize the regime and demonstrate its vulnerability to the peasants in a form they could understand. The hard core of terrorists, who by 1879 had banded themselves together as the Executive Committee of the People's Will, were only about thirty strong. But in a three-year campaign of bombing and assassination from 1878 to 1881 they brought the regime close to panic, and in so doing exposed the inadequacies of the Third Section. In 1878 General Mezentsov, chief of the gendarmes and head controller of the Third Section, was stabbed to death in broad daylight in one of the main streets of St. Petersburg. His escort, Lieutenant Colonel Makarov, was so ill-prepared that he succeeded only in striking the assassin with his umbrella. The assassin escaped. After several further assassinations and attempts on the life of the Tsar, who was formally condemned to death by the People's Will, an investigation into the functioning of the Third Section revealed so many lapses in security that the Tsar "could not consider himself safe in his own residence."⁶

In August 1880 the discredited Third Section was abolished and replaced by a new Department of State Police (renamed in 1883 simply the Department of Police), responsible for all aspects of state security. Political crime was made the responsibility of a Special Department (Osobyi Otdel) within Police Headquarters and of a regional network of Security Sections (Okhrannoye Otdelenie), the first of which were set up in 1881. Henceforth the political police system became collectively known as the Okhrana. The reorganization failed, however, to save Alexander II, who was assassinated in 1881 with a crudely constructed hand grenade.

The Okhrana was unique in the Europe of its time in both the extent of its powers and the scope of its activities. Other European police forces operated under the law. The Okhrana, however, was a law unto itself. In matters of political crime it had the right to search, to

imprison, and to exile on its own authority. The basic difference between Russia and the rest of Europe, wrote the liberal convert from Marxism, Peter Struve, in 1903, was "the omnipotence of the political police" on which Tsarism depended for its survival. Tsarist Russia, however, never became a full-fledged police state. By subsequent Soviet standards, the enormous powers of the Okhrana were used on only a modest scale. Even during the repression of the 1880s, only seventeen people were executed for political crimes—all actual or attempted assassinations. Among the terrorists who went to the scaffold was Alexander Ulyanov, condemned to death for his part in an unsuccessful plot to kill Alexander III on March 1, 1887, the sixth anniversary of Alexander II's assassination. Ulyanov's seventeen-year-old brother Vladimir (better known by his later alias, Lenin) is said to have sworn vengeance against the Tsarist regime. By 1901, 4,113 Russians were in internal exile for political crimes, 180 of them at hard labor.⁷

By far the most persecuted group in the Russian Empire was the Jews. Popular anti-Semitism, state-encouraged pogroms, disabling laws, and multiple forms of discrimination during the reigns of Alexander III (1881-94) and Nicholas II (1894-1917) led to the exodus of several million Russian Jews, mainly to the United States. The regime, from the Tsar downward, found the Jews a convenient scapegoat on whom to focus popular discontents. The sudden expulsion of almost thirty thousand Jews from Moscow at Passover 1891 set a precedent for Stalin's much larger-scale deportation of other ethnic minorities. Though the Okhrana did not originate state-sponsored anti-Semitism, it helped to implement it. The Okhrana official Komissarov received an official reward of 10,000 rubles for inciting anti-Jewish riots with pamphlets printed on Police Department presses.⁸ The last head of the Okhrana, A. T. Vasilyev, self-righteously condemned as "base slander" "excited newspaper articles" in the West that accused the Tsarist government and the Okhrana of conniving at the pogroms. He explained in his memoirs that the "core of the evil" was the "unfortunate inaptitude of the Jews for healthy productive work":

The government would never have had the slightest reason to adopt measures directed against the Jews had not these been rendered imperative by the necessity for protecting the Russian population, and especially the peasants. . . . There was a certain kind of oppression of the Jews in Russia, but, unfortunately, this was far from being as effective as it ought

to have been. The Government did seek to protect the peasants from the ruthless exploitation of the Jews; but its action bore only too little fruit.⁹

State-sponsored anti-Semitism helps to explain why Marxism spread more rapidly among the Jews than among any other ethnic group in the Russian Empire. The first Marxist party with a mass following was the Jewish Bund, founded in 1897. Jews were prominent also among the founders of both the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, the main Marxist grouping, in 1898, and the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the successor of the Populists, in 1902. The growing Jewish presence in the revolutionary leadership further fueled the Okhrana's anti-Semitism.¹⁰

Despite the Jewish origins of many "Old Bolsheviks," anti-Semitism was to reemerge, usually in disguise, under Stalin. Unlike the Okhrana, the KGB has promoted no pogroms. But it remains the most anti-Semitic section of the Soviet establishment. Though the *nomenklatura* as a whole is almost closed to Jews, the Foreign Ministry and Central Committee are normally prepared to consider candidates of half-Jewish descent. The KGB is not. Behind the recurrent obsession of some KGB officers with Zionist conspiracies and "ideological subversion" lurk remnants of the anti-Semitic myths propagated by the Okhrana. In January 1985, L. P. Zamoysky, deputy head of the FCD Directorate of Intelligence Information, a man with a reputation for both intelligence and good judgment, solemnly assured the London KGB residency, in Gordievsky's presence, that the Freemasons, whose rites, he was convinced, were of Jewish origin, were part of the great Zionist conspiracy.¹¹

KGB training manuals and lecture courses are understandably reluctant to acknowledge any continuities between the Okhrana and KGB in their treatment of political criminals or Jewish dissidents. Rather greater recognition is given to the Okhrana's foreign intelligence work.¹² The main priority of the Okhrana abroad was the surveillance of Russian émigrés, nowadays conducted by KR (Counterintelligence) line officers in each KGB residency. The emigration of political dissidents, which had begun with Herzen's exile in 1847, gathered pace among the Populist generation of the 1870s. By the reign of Nicholas II there were almost five thousand revolutionary émigrés preparing for the overthrow of Tsarism by methods ranging from making bombs to research in the Reading Room of the British Museum.¹³

The headquarters of the Okhrana's Foreign Agency (Za-granichnaya Agentura), set up for the surveillance of the émigrés, was located in the Russian embassy in Paris, the main émigré center.¹⁴ According to French *Sûreté* records, the Foreign Agency began work in Paris, probably on a small scale, in 1882.¹⁵ By 1884 it was fully operational, under the direction of the formidable Pyotr Rachkovsky. During the Populist era Rachkovsky had been a minor civil servant with revolutionary sympathies. In 1879 he was arrested by the Third Section and given the option of exile in Siberia or a career in the political police. Rachkovsky chose the latter and went on to become the most influential foreign intelligence officer in the history of Tsarist Russia. Unlike later KGB residents in Paris, he was also a prominent figure in Parisian high society, accumulating a fortune by speculation on the Bourse, entertaining lavishly in his villa at St. Cloud, and numbering directors of the *Sûreté*, ministers, and presidents among his intimates. A writer in the newspaper *Écho de Paris* said of him in 1901:

If ever you meet him in society, I very much doubt whether you will feel the slightest misgivings about him, for nothing in his appearance reveals his sinister function. Fat, restless, always with a smile on his lips . . . he looks more like some genial, jolly fellow on a spree. . . . He has one rather noticeable weakness—that he is passionately fond of our little Parisiennes—but he is the most skillful operator to be found in the ten capitals of Europe.¹⁶

Rachkovsky and his successors as heads of the Foreign Agency enjoyed much the same status as the heads or deputy heads of the Okhrana in St. Petersburg, as well as considerable freedom of action. Like the Okhrana within Russia, the Foreign Agency employed both "external" surveillance (by plainclothes detectives, concierges, and others) and "internal" penetration (by police spies, some of whom had begun as genuine revolutionaries) against Russian émigrés.¹⁷ So, far from objecting to Foreign Agency operations on French soil, the *Sûreté* welcomed them as a means of extending its own intelligence gathering. A *Sûreté* report concluded on the eve of the First World War:

It is impossible, on any objective assessment, to deny the usefulness of having a Russian police operating in Paris,

whether officially or not, whose purpose is to keep under surveillance the activities of Russian revolutionaries.

In order to maintain the good will of the French authorities, the Foreign Agency made a habit of exaggerating the revolutionary menace. The Sûreté put the number of Russian revolutionaries in the Paris area alone in 1914 at over forty thousand—almost ten times the real total for the whole of Western Europe.¹⁸

The willingness of other European police forces to cooperate with the Foreign Agency was increased by a spate of anarchist assassinations. Among the assassins' leading victims were President Carnot of France in 1894; Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, the Spanish prime minister, in 1897; the Empress Elizabeth of Austria-Hungary in 1898; King Umberto of Italy in 1900; President McKinley of the United States in 1901; and a succession of prominent Russians: N. P. Bogolepov, the minister of education in 1901; D. S. Sipyagin, minister of the interior (and thus responsible for the Okhrana), in 1902; Sipyagin's successor, V. K. Plehve, in 1904; Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, governor-general of Moscow in 1906; and P. A. Stolypin, prime minister and minister of the interior, in 1911. In 1898 an international conference of security agencies in Rome approved a resolution that "The Central Authorities responsible in each country for the surveillance of anarchists establish direct contact with one another and exchange all relevant information."¹⁹

From Paris the Foreign Agency ran small groups of agents who kept watch on Russian émigrés in Britain, Germany, and—from 1912—Italy. In Switzerland, an increasingly important center of the revolutionary diaspora, it had three Geneva policemen on its payroll to obtain information directly from police files and provide a check on intelligence sent by the Swiss authorities. Surveillance of émigrés in Belgium and Scandinavia was carried out by a mixture of the local police and Foreign Agency agents sent from Paris on special assignments.²⁰ During the few years before the First World War, however, the Foreign Agency was assailed by protests from socialist and radical deputies for its activities on French soil.

In 1913 the Russian embassy thought it prudent to announce that the agency had been discontinued. Its work was officially taken over by a private detective agency, the Agence Bint et Sambain, headed by Henri Bint, a former French employee of the Agency. In reality, the agency continued to operate, though with greater discretion than in the

past. But its official, if fictional, abolition damaged its close cooperation with the Sûreté, which complained in 1914 that "the French government will no longer be able to know as precisely as in the past what dangerous foreign refugees in France are doing."²¹

The Foreign Agency did not limit itself to intelligence collection. It also pioneered a wide variety of what the KGB later called "active measures," designed to influence foreign governments and public opinion, and "special actions" involving various forms of violence. In 1886 Rachkovsky's agents blew up the People's Will printing shop in Geneva, successfully making the explosion look like the work of disaffected revolutionaries. In 1890 Rachkovsky "unmasked" a bomb-making conspiracy by Russian émigrés in Paris. At a sensational trial some of the plotters were sentenced to imprisonment (one named Landezen, who had fled abroad, in *absentia*) and others exiled. The Okhrana then arrested sixty-three revolutionaries in Russia who were alleged to have links with the Paris bomb makers. In reality the plot had been inspired, on Rachkovsky's instructions, by Landezen, who was an agent provocateur of the Foreign Agency and provided the money for the bomb factory from agency funds.²²

During his eighteen years in Paris (1884-1902) Rachkovsky managed to cover the tracks of his involvement in this and other cases of alleged émigré bomb factories and bombings. Raytayev, his successor as head of the Foreign Agency (1903-1905), was less fortunate. He was recalled to Russia after the Sûreté had discovered his involvement in an unsuccessful bomb attack in Paris against Prince Trubetskoi and the bombing of a French protest meeting against Tsarist repression of the 1905 revolution, during which two *gardes républicains* were wounded. In 1909, a revolutionary journalist named Vladimir Burtsev at last revealed Rachkovsky's role in the 1890 bomb-making conspiracy. He also alleged that the agent provocateur Landezen, who had escaped in 1890, was none other than the current Foreign Agency chief in Paris, Harting. The Sûreté concluded that Harting's "precipitate flight and disappearance" tended to prove the truth of Burtsev's revelations. Curiously, the Sûreté seemed little concerned about such episodes. The intelligence provided by the agency was, in its view, "*des plus précieux*," and clearly outweighed the crimes of its agents provocateurs.²³

Rachkovsky specialized in forgery as well as the use of agents provocateurs. There is a strong probability that he was responsible for the fabrication of the famous anti-Semitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which purported to describe a Jewish plot for world

domination. The *Protocols* had limited influence before the First World War. For a time Nicholas II believed they provided the key to an understanding of the 1905 revolution but was then persuaded that they were a forgery and complained that they "polluted the pure cause of anti-Semitism." Between the wars, however, the *Protocols* reemerged as one of the central texts in Nazi and fascist anti-Semitism, becoming perhaps the most influential forgery of the twentieth century.²⁴

Rachkovsky's role was not limited to intelligence collection and "active measures." He also sought to influence Russian foreign policy. Rachkovsky arrived in Paris in 1884 as a committed advocate of an alliance with France, diplomatically isolated since her defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. He was regularly used as secret intermediary in negotiations both for the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance in 1891-94 and for its modification in 1899. Among Rachkovsky's closest contacts in Paris was Théophile Delcassé, who became from 1898 to 1905 the longest-serving foreign minister in the seventy-year history of the French Third Republic. In arranging his own visit to St. Petersburg to modify the terms of the Dual Alliance in 1899, the Tsar's state visit to France in 1901, and President Loubet's return visit to Russia in 1902, Delcassé bypassed the French ambassador, the Marquis de Montebello, and worked instead through Rachkovsky. The Russian foreign minister, Count Muraviev, informed the unfortunate Montebello, "We have the fullest confidence in Monsieur Rachkovsky and he appears to have gained that of the French government." Rachkovsky eventually overreached himself and was recalled from Paris in 1902. What led to his downfall, however, was not his increasing intrusion into Franco-Russian diplomacy but the outrage of the Tsarina at his incautious revelation that a French "doctor" employed by her was an unqualified charlatan.²⁵

The most important contribution by the Okhrana to the making of Tsarist foreign policy was its pioneering role in the development of sigint—the signals intelligence derived from intercepting and where possible decrypting other governments' communications. Like most major powers of the *ancien régime*, eighteenth-century Russia had possessed *cabinets noirs*, or "black chambers," which secretly intercepted both private and diplomatic correspondence. In Western Europe the development of the *cabinets noirs* was disrupted in varying degrees during the nineteenth century by public and parliamentary protests at interference with the mail service. In Britain, for example, the Decyphering Branch was abolished in 1844 after a Commons row over the

opening of the correspondence of the exiled Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini. British sight did not resume until the First World War.²⁶ In autocratic Russia, however, the development of sight was undisturbed by parliamentary protests. The Okhrana had black chambers working for it in the post offices of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Warsaw, Odessa, Kiev, Kharkov, Riga, Vilna, Tomsk, and Tiflis. The last head of the Okhrana, A. T. Vasilyev, virtuously insisted that their work was directed only against subversives and criminals: "The right-minded citizen certainly never had any reason to fear the censorship, for private business was, on principle, completely ignored."²⁷ In reality, as under the *ancien régime*, letter opening was a source of gossip as well as of intelligence. The coded correspondence of the Archbishop of Irkutsk disclosed, when decrypted, that he was having an affair with an abbess.²⁸

The Okhrana's chief cryptanalyst, Ivan Zybin, was a code breaker of genius. According to the Okhrana chief in Moscow, P. Zavarzin, "He was a fanatic, not to say a maniac, for his work. Simple ciphers he cleared up at a glance, but complicated ciphers placed him in a state almost of trance from which he did not emerge until the problem was resolved." The original priority of the Okhrana's cryptanalysts was the coded correspondence of revolutionaries inside and outside Russia, but the Okhrana extended its operations to include the diplomatic telegrams sent and received by St. Petersburg embassies. Intercepted diplomatic dispatches had been an irregular source of foreign intelligence ever since the 1740s. In 1800 the foreign minister N. P. Panin wrote to his ambassador in Berlin:

We possess the ciphers of the correspondence of the King [of Prussia] with his chargé d'affaires here: should you suspect Haugwitz [the Prussian foreign minister] of bad faith, it is only necessary to find some pretext to get him to write here on the subject in question. As soon as his or his King's despatch is deciphered, I will not fail to apprise you of its content.²⁹

During the early nineteenth century, the increasing use of couriers rather than the mails for diplomatic traffic steadily reduced the number of dispatches intercepted by *cabinets noirs*. The growing use of the electric telegraph in the latter part of the century, however, greatly simplified both the transmission and interception of diplomatic commu-

nlications. In France, diplomatic traffic at the end of the century was decrypted in *cabinets noirs* at both the foreign ministry and the Sûreté.³⁰ Similarly, in Russia diplomatic cryptanalysis was shared between the Okhrana and a *cabinet noir* in the foreign ministry. Under Aleksandr Savinsky, head of the foreign ministry's *cabinet noir* from 1901 to 1910, its status was enhanced and its organization improved.³¹ The Okhrana, however, probably remained the dominant partner in the cryptanalytic cooperation with the foreign ministry.

The breaking of high-grade code and cipher systems usually depends not simply on the skill of code breakers but also on assistance from espionage. The Okhrana became the first modern intelligence service to make one of its major priorities the theft of embassy codes and ciphers as well as plain-text versions of diplomatic telegrams, which could be compared with the coded originals. In so doing it set an important precedent for the KGB. As British ambassador in St. Petersburg from 1904 to 1906, Sir Charles Hardinge discovered that the head Chancery servant had been offered the then enormous sum of £1,000 to steal a copy of one of the diplomatic ciphers.³² In June 1904 Hardinge reported to the Foreign Office what he termed "a disagreeable shock." A prominent Russian politician had said he "did not mind how much I reported in writing what he told me in conversation, but he begged me on no account to telegraph as all our telegrams are known!"³³ Hardinge discovered three months later that Rachkovsky had set up a secret department in the ministry of the interior (which was responsible for the Okhrana), "with a view to obtaining access to the archives of the foreign missions in St. Petersburg."³⁴

Efforts to improve the British embassy's rather primitive security were unavailing. Cecil Spring Rice, the embassy secretary, reported in February 1906: "For some time past papers have been abstracted from this Embassy. . . . The porter and other persons in connection with the Embassy are in the pay of the Police department and are also paid on delivery of papers." Spring Rice claimed to have "established" that the operation against the British embassy was run by Komissarov, the Okhrana official who had recently received an award for his successes in promoting anti-Semitic propaganda. On Komissarov's instructions, "Emissaries of the police are constantly waiting in the evening outside the Embassy in order to take charge of the papers procured." Despite the installation of a new embassy safe, the fitting of padlocks to the filing cabinets, and instructions to diplomatic staff not to let the Chancery keys out of their possession, the theft of papers continued. Two months

later Spring Rice obtained proof “that access has been obtained to the archives of the Embassy, which have been taken off to the house of the Agent Komissarov, where they have been photographed.” The probable culprit was a bribed embassy servant who had taken wax impressions of the padlocks to the filing cabinets, and had then been provided with duplicate keys by the Okhrana. The American, Swedish, and Belgian embassies all reported similar experiences.³⁵

By the turn of the century, if not before, the diplomatic intelligence derived from sigint and stolen embassy documents was having an important (though still almost unresearched) influence on Tsarist foreign policy.³⁶ From 1898 to 1901 Russia made repeated attempts to persuade Germany to sign a secret agreement on spheres of influence in the Turkish Empire that would recognize her age-old ambitions in the Bosphorus. The attempts were abandoned at the end of 1901 because, as the Russian foreign minister Count Lamsdorf informed his ambassador in Berlin, decrypted German telegrams showed that the German government had no real intention of signing an agreement.³⁷

Throughout the reign of Nicholas II, Russia remained the world leader in diplomatic sigint. Britain, Germany, the United States, and most minor powers had no sigint agencies at all until the First World War. Austrian sigint seems to have been limited to military communications.³⁸ Tsarist Russia’s only serious competitor in diplomatic sigint was her ally, France. During the twenty years before the First World War the *cabinets noirs* at the Quai d’Orsay and the Sûreté had some success in breaking the diplomatic codes and ciphers of most major powers. But whereas Russia broke some French diplomatic codes and ciphers, France was unable to decrypt any Russian diplomatic traffic at all (though she did have some success with Foreign Agency codes and ciphers).

In the summer of 1905, during the closing stages of, simultaneously, the Russo-Japanese War and the Franco-German crisis over Morocco, there was a brief period of sigint cooperation between Russia and her French ally. In June 1905 the Russian ambassador, on the orders of his government, handed the French prime minister, Maurice Rouvier, a copy of a decrypted German telegram dealing with the Moroccan crisis. Rouvier considered the telegram so important that he ordered the Sûreté to pass on to the Foreign Agency all the Japanese diplomatic traffic its *cabinet noir* was able to decrypt. The telegrams sent to St. Petersburg by the acting head of the Foreign Agency, Manuilov, transmitting the Japanese decrypts, were themselves decrypted by

the *cabinet noir* at the Quai d'Orsay. Unaware that the decrypts had been given to the Russians on the orders of the prime minister, the Quai d'Orsay concluded instead that there had been a serious breach of sigint security and ordered its own cryptanalysts to break off all contact with those at the Sûreté. As a result of the farcical misunderstanding generated in Paris by the brief period of Franco-Russian sigint cooperation, the *cabinets noirs* at the Quai d'Orsay and the Sûreté continued independently for the next six years to decrypt substantial amounts of diplomatic traffic—sometimes the same diplomatic traffic—with ever communicating the results to each other. There seems to have been no further exchange of sigint between Russia and France.³⁹

The intermittent confusion in France's handling of sigint had one major adverse consequence for Russian cryptanalysts. Russia continued until the eve of the First World War to decrypt significant, but still unquantifiable, amounts of the diplomatic traffic of all but one of the major powers. The exception, from 1912, was Germany.⁴⁰ The changes in German diplomatic code and cipher systems that seem to have defeated Russian cryptanalysts during the two years before the outbreak of war in 1914 stemmed directly from French indiscretions during the Franco-German Agadir crisis of 1911. In the course of that crisis the French foreign minister, Justin de Selves, discovered from German telegrams decrypted by his *cabinet noir* that the prime minister, Joseph Caillaux, had negotiated with the Germans behind his back. The decrypts were used by de Selves and some of his officials to start a whispering campaign accusing Caillaux of treachery. Angered by the campaign against him, Caillaux took the extraordinary step of calling on the German chargé d'affaires and asking to see the original text of telegrams that referred to him in order to compare them with the decrypted versions. "I was wrong," he later admitted to the president of the Republic, "but I had to defend myself." The Germans, not surprisingly, introduced new diplomatic ciphers, which defeated the French as well as their Russian allies.⁴¹

In Russia, as in France, foreign intelligence collection and analysis suffered from interdepartmental rivalry. Military intelligence was the responsibility of the first section of the General Staff. Though intelligence about the German army before 1914 was mediocre, that about Russia's other main opponent, Austria, was excellent.⁴² Military intelligence's main source, Colonel Alfred Redl, a senior Austrian intelligence officer, was probably the most important agent anywhere in Europe during the generation before the First World War. During the

winter of 1901–1902, Colonel Batyushin, head of Russian military intelligence in Warsaw, discovered that, unknown either to his superiors or to his friends, Redl was a promiscuous homosexual. By a mixture of blackmail and bribery of the kind sometimes later employed by the KGB, he recruited Redl as a penetration agent. With the money given him by the Russians, Redl was able to purchase cars not merely for himself but for one of his favorite lovers as well, a young Uhlan officer, to whom he also paid 600 crowns a month. Among the voluminous intelligence he provided during the decade before his exposure and suicide in 1913 were the Austrian mobilization plans against both Russia and Serbia.⁴³

Tsarist diplomats and consuls also dabbled in intelligence, occasionally collecting material of military value. But military and diplomatic intelligence were poorly coordinated, reflecting the general lack of communication between the ministries of war and foreign affairs. Despite the army's interest in humint (human intelligence), it failed to grasp the importance of sigint. The first great German victory on the Eastern Front, at Tannenberg in August 1914, owed much to the Russian forces' remarkable foolishness in sending radio messages unenciphered, in clear text. German radio operators initially began listening to enemy signals simply out of curiosity, but the German operations officer, Colonel Max Hoffmann, who became the architect of victory, quickly grasped their importance. Tannenberg became the first military victory made possible by sigint. Thanks to sigint, wrote Hoffmann later, "We knew all the Russian plans." Almost as in a war game, the Russians found themselves surrounded by an enemy who had followed their every movement.⁴⁴

Just as the Okhrana had no monopoly on foreign intelligence collection, so it had no monopoly either on "active measures." Russia's most numerous agents of influence were foreign journalists who were bribed by the ministry of finance to support the massive foreign loans required by the Tsarist regime and the Russian economy, and to calm the anxieties of foreign investors about the safety of their investments. In much of pre-1914 Europe it was regarded as perfectly normal for governments to "subsidize" friendly foreign newspapers. A French parliamentary report in 1913, though critical of some aspects of intelligence work, described the need for such subsidies as "incontestable."⁴⁵ Russian "subsidies" were the largest in Europe.

Since France was by far the biggest foreign investor in prewar Russia, the chief target of the ministry of finance was the French press.

Artur Raffalovich, the ministry's representative in Paris, bribed every French newspaper of note with the single exception of the Socialist (later Communist) *L'Humanité*. By March 1905 the confidence of French investors had been so shaken by both the abortive Russian revolution and Russian reverses in the war against Japan that with the support of Delcassé, the French foreign minister, Raffalovich was distributing bribes to the tune of 200,000 francs a month. As usual in the case of agents of influence, it is difficult to assess the importance of the press support purchased in this way. In March 1905 even Raffalovich's largess failed to prevent French banks from breaking off negotiations for a further loan. By 1914, however, 25 percent of France's foreign investment was in Russia (four-fifths of it in government loans)—as compared with only 9 percent in the vast French Empire. Without press support, the kind of crisis of confidence that prevented the conclusion of a loan in March 1905 would surely have been more frequent.⁴⁶

Though Tsarist Russia's foreign intelligence system was diffuse and poorly coordinated, it established a series of important precedents for the Soviet period. It engaged in a wide variety of "active measures" as well as in intelligence collection. It led the world in sight and in the use of espionage to assist its code breakers. And in Alfred Redl it had the prototype of the more numerous foreign penetration agents (or "moles") who in the 1930s were to become the chief asset of Soviet foreign intelligence. There was, however, another Tsarist precedent that did even more than Redl to persuade Soviet intelligence services of the potential of penetration agents as a weapon against their opponents. The Bolsheviks discovered from Okhrana files after the February Revolution that almost from the moment the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903 they had been more successfully penetrated than perhaps any other revolutionary group.⁴⁷ Okhrana knowledge of Bolshevik organization and activities was so detailed and thorough that, despite the destruction of some of its records in the aftermath of the February Revolution, what survived has since become one of the major documentary sources for early Bolshevik history.

Some Okhrana files must later have been a source of embarrassment to Stalin, who, once in power, posed as the most loyal of Lenin's followers. In reality, as late as 1909, he criticized Lenin for a number of theoretical "blunders" and for an "incorrect organizational policy." A letter intercepted by the Foreign Agency in Paris in December 1910 reveals the moment when Stalin finally decided to throw in his lot with

Lenin. Lenin's line, he wrote, was "the only correct one," and he described Lenin himself as a "shrewd fellow" (*umnyi muzhik*).⁴⁸

It is unlikely that Stalin was ever, as has been suggested, an Okhrana agent, though the Okhrana may well have tried to recruit him. The Okhrana had, however, no shortage of other agents in the Bolshevik Party. Of the five members of the Bolshevik Party's St. Petersburg Committee in 1908-1909, no fewer than four were Okhrana agents.⁴⁹ Other anti-Tsarist groups were also penetrated to varying degrees. Among those in the Social Revolutionary Party in the pay of Okhrana was the head of its "Fighting Section" from 1904 to 1909, Yevno Azev, who was responsible for organizing assassinations and terrorist attacks. Among his victims was the minister of the interior Vyacheslav von Plehve, blown to pieces by a Fighting Section bomb. Azev, however, was a confused figure who scarcely knew in the end "whether he was a terrorist spying upon the government or a police agent spying upon the terror."⁵⁰

The most successful mole recruited by the Okhrana in 1910, from the Tsarist viewpoint, was a Moscow worker named Roman Malinovsky, who in 1912 was elected as one of the six Bolshevik deputies in the Duma, the Tsarist parliament. "For the *first* time," wrote Lenin enthusiastically, "we have an *outstanding leader* [Malinovsky] from among the workers representing us in the Duma." In a party dedicated to proletarian revolution but as yet without proletarian leaders, Lenin saw Malinovsky, whom he brought onto the Bolshevik Central Committee, as a portent of great importance: "It is really possible to build a workers' party with such people, though the difficulties will be incredibly great!" The Bolshevik and Menshevik deputies elected in 1912 sat for a year as members of a single Social Democratic group in the Duma. But when the group split in 1913 Malinovsky became chairman of the Bolshevik fraction.⁵¹

By 1912 Lenin was so concerned by the problem of Okhrana penetration that, on his initiative, the Bolshevik Central Committee set up a three-man "provocation commission"—one of whose members was Malinovsky. After the arrest of Stalin and his fellow member of the Central Committee, Yakov Sverdlov, in February 1913, as the result of information supplied by Malinovsky, Lenin discussed with Malinovsky what could be done to forestall further arrests. In July 1913 Lenin again discussed the problem of Okhrana penetration with Malinovsky and two of his chief lieutenants, Lev Kamenev and Grigori Zinoviev. Only Malinovsky saw the irony of their conclusion that there must be an

Okhrana agent near to the six Bolshevik deputies whose chairman he was. He was instructed to be "as conspiratorial as possible" in order to minimize the dangers of police penetration. S. P. Beletsky, the director of the Police Department, described Malinovsky as "the pride of the Okhrana."

But the strain of his double life eventually proved too much. Even Lenin, his strongest supporter, became concerned about his heavy drinking. In May 1914 the new deputy minister of the interior, V. F. Dzhunkovsky, possibly fearing the scandal that would result if Malinovsky's increasingly erratic behavior led to the revelation that the Okhrana employed him as an agent in the Duma, decided to get rid of him. Malinovsky resigned from the Duma and fled from St. Petersburg with a 6,000-ruble payoff, which the Okhrana urged him to use to start a new life abroad. Rumors rapidly spread that he had been an Okhrana agent. Yuli Martov, the Menshevik leader, wrote in June "We are all certain without the slightest doubt that he is a provocateur . . . but whether we will be able to prove it is another matter." Though accepting that Malinovsky had committed "political suicide," Lenin dismissed the charges against him.

When Malinovsky reemerged in a German prisoner-of-war camp, spreading Bolshevik propaganda among his fellow POWs, Lenin resumed correspondence with him and continued to defend him against the charge of having worked for the Okhrana. That charge, Lenin repeated in January 1917, was "absolute nonsense." When proof began to emerge from Okhrana files opened after the February Revolution, Lenin at first refused to believe it. Malinovsky's career came to a tragically bizarre end eighteen months later. In October 1918 he returned to Russia, insisting that "he could not live outside the revolution" and apparently hoping to rehabilitate himself. He was tried by a revolutionary tribunal and shot in the gardens of the Kremlin on November 6, 1918.

Malinovsky's ability to deceive Lenin for so long had much to do with Lenin's sense of guilt, like that of some other upper-class revolutionaries, at his own privileged upbringing. Malinovsky's supreme merit, in Lenin's eyes, was his lower-class origin. He was the prototype of the working-class organizers and orators who were in disappointingly short supply in Bolshevik ranks. Malinovsky's criminal record and sometimes violent habits only emphasized, in Lenin's view, his authentic working-class credentials. Lenin's initial attraction to Stalin, of which he was also later to repent, had a similar origin. Stalin's

humble origins and rough manner, free from all trace of bourgeois refinement, once again triggered Lenin's feelings of guilt at his own class origins.

The penetration of the Bolshevik Party had, paradoxically, advantages as well as disadvantages for Lenin. Beletsky, the prewar police director, later admitted that "the whole purpose" of his prewar policy had been to prevent, at all costs, the unification of Russian socialism. "I worked," he said, "on the principle of divide and rule." The man most likely to keep Russian Socialists divided was Lenin. Though many Bolsheviks hoped for reunion with the Mensheviks, Lenin stood out resolutely against it. Beletsky actually smoothed Lenin's path on a number of occasions by conveniently arresting both his more difficult Menshevik opponents and those Bolsheviks most anxious for the reunification of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

But whereas the Okhrana was convinced that a disunited party would necessarily mean a weaker socialist movement, Lenin believed that, on the contrary, the existence of a separate Bolshevik Party was the key to victory. Only a disciplined, doctrinally pure, "monolithic" élite of hardened revolutionaries could lead the Russian people to the promised land. Though the promised land was never reached, the chaotic conditions that followed the overthrow of Tsarism in February 1917 proved Lenin's strategy of revolution right. In the aftermath of the February Revolution the Bolsheviks were fewer in number than either of their main rivals, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. But it was the Bolsheviks who took power in October. The remarkable tactical victory of the Okhrana in penetrating the Bolsheviks thus ended in 1917 in strategic defeat and its own extinction.

The February Revolution (March 8-12, 1917, by today's calendar) took most revolutionaries by surprise. Only six weeks earlier the forty-six-year-old Lenin, in exile in Switzerland, had predicted: "We the old will probably not live to see the decisive battles of the coming revolution." The Okhrana probably had a more accurate sense of the mood in Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was renamed on the outbreak of war) than any of the revolutionary groups. One of its agents predicted on the eve of revolution: "The underground revolutionary parties are preparing a revolution, but a revolution, if it takes place, will be spontaneous, quite likely a hunger riot." Those closest to revolution, he reported, were the mothers of large families, "exhausted from standing endlessly at the tail of queues, and having suffered so much in watching their sick and half-starved children": "they are stockpiles of inflamma-

ble material, needing only a spark to set them afire.⁵² Sure enough, the Revolution was sparked by demonstrations among women queuing for bread on March 8. By the 10th the whole of Petrograd was on strike.

The decisive factor at this point was the attitude of the Petrograd garrison. In 1905 the Revolution had been broken by the army. In March 1917 the army joined the Revolution. Once again, the Okhrana had detected the way the wind was blowing. A political rally by striking workers had been broken up by Cossacks on February 27, but, reported the Okhrana, "in general there was an impression that the Cossacks were on the side of the workers."⁵³ On March 12 a section of the Petrograd garrison mutinied and the success of the Revolution was assured. Three days later Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in favor of his brother the Grand Duke Mikhail. When Mikhail renounced the throne the next day, March 16, over four centuries of rule by the Romanov dynasty came to an end. Power passed to a Provisional Government mainly composed of liberal politicians, coexisting uneasily with a Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which became the model, and in some sense the spokesman, for local soviets all over Russia.

With Tsarism into what Trotsky termed "the dustbin of history" went its political police. On March 12 the crowd broke into Okhrana headquarters. According to the outraged director of police, A. T. Vasilyev:

All the archives of the Special Investigation Branch, with records of finger-prints, photographs, and other data concerning thieves, forgers, and murderers, were dragged down into the courtyard and there solemnly burned. Further, the intruders also broke open my desk and appropriated 25,000 rubles of public money, which I had had in my keeping.

Though Vasilyev virtuously protested that he "could not recall a single illegal action" for which he was responsible, he soon found himself in the Peter and Paul fortress, complaining of having to sleep on "straw mattresses and pillows stuffed with hens' feathers," eat "dreadful, evil-smelling soup and an equally repulsive hash made of all sorts of unspeakable offal," and of being allowed to have a bath only once a fortnight in a freezing bathroom with "drafts in every direction."⁵⁴ The imprisonment of the head of the Okhrana, like the reduction of the Tsar

Nicholas II, Emperor of All Russia, to the rank of Citizen Romanov, seemed to symbolize the birth of a new democratic order and the final victory over despotism. In the aftermath of revolution both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet believed that Russia would never again have a political police.